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ABSTRACT

The content and design of a workplace communication workshop jointly sponsored by a university teachers' center and a local union are described. The workshop objective is to provide workers for whom English is a second language with upgraded writing skills needed to fill out report forms, improved document reading skills for reading charts and graphs, math skills to tally production and formulate statistics, and the expanded vocabulary needed to read work-related forms and documents. Worker needs and interests direct course content and material selection, and participants work individually on computers to become familiar with word processing and spreadsheet software used in their jobs. Instructional materials drawn from workplace documents and forms are listed, and a list of textbooks used is also provided. Fifteen specific class activities using the forms, documents, and workplace tools are described. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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ED 392 309

Chicago Teachers' Center of Northeastern Illinois University and Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union

Worker Education Program

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Workplace Communication Workshop

1994

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Introduction

In the nineteenth century, factory workers were considered literate if they were able to write their names. Most jobs in the Industrial Revolution did not require the ability to read, write or do mathematics and training for advanced skill jobs was done long-term through observational and hands-on apprenticeship programs. (Gowen,1992) Immigrant workers with limited English-language skills were able to find jobs and work with little need for communication skills.

With the rise of technology and shift to a global market place, factory workers need to read and do math for their job and they need to be able to function in a document-oriented society. Changes in management and production practices such as statistical quality control, gain-sharing, just-in-time production, and participatory management are requiring a different set of skills from factory workers. (Carnevale, et al., 1990) It is important for workers to read production reports, order forms, and quality control statistics.

In addition, workers must put in writing vacation requests, daily production schedules, training reports, and fill out a number of personnel forms. Implementations such as these have called for higher level communication skills from a workforce that is increasingly limited English proficient.

The Worker Education Program, a joint partnership between the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the Chicago Teachers' Center of Northeastern Illinois University, is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education National Workplace Literacy Program to prepare workers for the challenges of these changing times. The program provides classes which include: reading and writing, English as a Second Language, math, problem-solving, and teamwork. The program has served over 1,000 employees in the Chicago area and will be implementing similar programs in Louisville, Kentucky, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

This series of workshops engages ESL students in the higher levels of communication necessary in the workplace: essay writing, filling out forms and analyzing data. Students use statistics from the workplace to practice reading and manipulating data, workplace forms to practice filling in cells and essay writing to describe an accident or training session.

Objectives

The objectives of the Workplace Communications Workshops are to provide workers with:

- upgraded writing skills needed to fill out report forms;
- improved document reading skills needed to read charts and graphs;
- math skills to tally production and formulate statistics; and
- expanded vocabulary needed to read work-related forms and documents.

Methodology

The Worker Education Program uses a worker-centered participatory approach in the classroom. Workers' needs and interests direct course content and material selection and maximum worker participation, cooperation, and initiative are encouraged. Facilitators guide the class toward acheiving course objectives while workers take an active role in their own learning. Workers provide the class with workplace forms and documents, examples of workplace situations, data gathered from the plant floor. In class, workers use individually assigned computers to become familiar with word processing and spreadsheet software applications which are used in their jobs.

Materials for Class Activities

Materials from the workplace include:

- job application
- accident report form
- ACTWU brochure
- product catalogue
- daily production reports
- customer order forms
- vacation request form
- training reports
- timesheets/timecards
- costing procedures
- Material Safety Data sheets
- work order form
- reject/defect report form
- insurance form
- material/supply request form

The following textbooks are used for engaging participants in writing activities, extracting data, and examples of workplace forms:

Auerbach, E. and Wallerstein, N. (1987). ESL for Action: English for the Workplace. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Barasovska, J. (1988). Getting Started with Experience Stories. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Barndt, D., Belfiore, M. and Handscombe, J. (1991). English at Work. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Gordon, J. (1991). More Than a Job: Readings on Work and Society. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Ligon, F. and Tannenbaum, E. (1990). Picture Stories. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Robinson, C. and Rowekamp,.J. (1985). Speaking Up at Work. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Activities

1. Use the excerpt from the ACTWU brochure to practice keying in a word processing document. Students add in the ending by describing their own jobs.

> Welcome to ACTWU
>
> Welcome to your union, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. We are some quarter million men and women working together to improve our working and living conditions and to make our Union stronger! As a member of ACTWU, I work at ....

2. Students create a resume using bold, underline, center justified, tabs, etc. in order to have a distinctive and informative document.

3. Students write a letter to their supervisor requesting vacation time. They must make sure they add in date of return.

4. Using a form from the workplace and a scanner, students practice filling out the form.

5. Using a common form from the workplace, small groups of students critique the form and revise it according to the group's recommendations.

6. Using an Accident Report form, students fill out missing information and describe accidents that have occured at work.

7. Students create a chart depicting hourly production at the factory for a period of time using the spreadsheet.

8. Students create a checklist of safety hazard indicators using the spreadsheet program. They interview co-workers using the checklist and compile the results. (See ESL for Action, p. 97 for safety hazard questions.)

9. Using a customer order form, students write a request for needed supplies.

10. Students write a tally of supplies and materials used to make a number of different products using a spreadsheet.

11. Using information on production costs (cost of materials, employee wages, building costs, etc.), create a pie chart demonstrating the different quantities that go into making a single product.

12. Students write a suggestion for improvement of a production process or a safety procedure in memo form.

13. Students write a list of job steps in order and check them off as the steps are performed by a co-worker.

14. Students create a flowchart depicting the path a product takes from raw materials to shipping.

15. Students create an inventory list of tools and equipment on the plant floor using a spreadsheet. Changes are made as new items are received and others are damaged.

Bibliography

Carnevale, A., Gainer, L., and Meltzer, A. (1990). Workplace Basic: The Essential Skills Employers Want. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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Gowen, Sheryl Greenwood. (1992). The Politics of Workplace Literacy: A Case Study. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kagan, S. (1989). Cooperative Learning - Resources for Teachers. San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers.

Kennedy, K. and Roeder, S. (1975). Using Language Experience with Adults: A Guide for Teachers. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Soifer, R. et al. (1990). The Complete Theory-to-Practice Handbook of Adult Literacy. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.